Fullenwider

The Relation of the Early Poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge

THE RELATION OF THE EARLY POETRY OF WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

BY

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Introduction

Between the characteristic work of Coleridge and Wordsworth -- that which bears the stamp of the greatest original genius of each -- there is no similarity. The Ancient Mariner and The Prelude are distinctive, and typical of two different styles and kinds of ideas. But the same cannot be said of all the verse of the two writers; in the earlier period of their life and writings they struck notes too startlingly similar to be overlooked. Both were young poets trying their literary wings in a variety of directions. It was characteristic of Wordsworth's calmer temperament that he attempted no wild flights but contented himself with humble excursions of comparatively narrow range. Coleridge, on the other hand, could satisfy his restless, eager, inquiring spirit only by bolder flights in almost all directions. Among other forms and styles he used -- and used successfully at times -- that which Wordsworth eventually adopted as his typical one, the calm blank verse which carried best the Wordsworthian quiet reflections. Coleridge did not stop with this manner, however; he achieved his highest points in the strange, unearthly music of

Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan, and Christabel. Such work was totally out of Wordsworth's scope and ken. The result is that, although Wordsworth never attempted anything in Coleridge's own particular realm of genius, yet several of Coleridge's earlier poems may be called distinctly "Wordsworthian". The casual reader often lets such a statement imply that the influence of Wordsworth was the dominant one; in reality, it only says that in his early literary life Coleridge employed sometimes the form and style which Wordsworth afterwards adopted for the expression of his own peculiar genius, and raised to such a height of beauty and distinction that it has taken his name. Herein, however, lies the much-mooted question of the relation of the two poets in their early work. When we remember that from July 1797 until June 1798 they lived within a few miles of each other and enjoyed a close daily intercourse, discussing their work and hopes and plans together, the matter of influence becomes more significant. That there was a mutual influence and a great one is an obvious fact; just what that influence was, however, is more difficult to determine. Hitherto the question has never been satisfactorily answered.

Many of the critics of Wordsworth and Coleridge make no comment upon the respective influence of the two poets. Some merely acknowledge a reciprocal influence and make no attempt to weigh either. Wilfrid Brown in his study From Ottery to Highgate says: --

"How much the poets were to each other will perhaps never be definitely ascertained. The fact remains that no study of the one personality is complete without the mention of the influence of the other".[1]

Legouis is his Early Life of Wordsworth describes the mutual influence well as follows: --

"From this time, July 13, 1797, a daily intercourse was established between them, and upon each its influence was continuous and profound; an influence not merely such as is occasioned by reading or by an interview through the shock of two intelligences, but that of a life upon a life, and a man upon a man".[2]

Among those who do attempt to estimate this influence, there exists a variety of opinions. Some emphasize the influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth: -- Legouis in his Early Life of Wordsworth maintains that, although until July, 1797 Wordsworth had given influence but received none from Coleridge, henceforth the situation was reversed: --

"It was Coleridge whose influence was henceforth to infuse that (Wordsworth's) poetry with new elements whereby it would be at any rate profoundly modified if not transformed. Coleridge had hitherto received everything and had apparently given nothing in exchange. Wordsworth may have been struck by his friend's mystical conceptions but as yet he had not made them his own. Less amenable to influence, less easily permeated by the

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1. p. 20
2. p. 357

ideas of others, he had been stimulated, but in no way altered, by his early intercourse with Coleridge. The time when he would himself become the recipient was at hand".[1]

And again: -- "Wordsworth was naturally one of the first to receive the new truths from the lips of Coleridge as he gradually discovered them. These at first were but flashes of eloquence, whence a few ideas stood out in strong relief and sank into the depths of Wordsworth's mind, although they did not adapt themselves to its atmosphere without undergoing some modification".[2]

Legouis finally sums up the influence as follows: --

"Wordsworth's intimacy with Coleridge was as opportune as it was beneficial. Coleridge is the only person besides Dorothy by whom Wordsworth has admitted that he was deeply influenced. He has said that his intellect had contracted an important debt to him, and that the influence of Coleridge had penetrated to his heart of hearts. He called Coleridge the most wonderful man he had ever known, 'wonderful for the originality of his mind and the power he possessed of throwing out in profusion grand central truths from which might be evolved the most comprehensive systems'. It was Coleridge who provided or rather assisted him to find the only thing needful to make him the poet he finally became -- namely, a philosophy".[3]

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[1] p.357
[2] p.329
[3] p.318

James Dykes Campbell in his Life of Coleridge also attaches great significance to the influence of Coleridge: --

"Coleridge's (influence) was by far the more active, as well as the finer and more penetrating, and the immense receptiveness of Wordsworth must have acted as a strong incentive to its exercise. And this is true, I believe, notwithstanding that there are more distinct traces of Wordsworth's influences on Coleridge's poetry than of the converse. It was a consequence of Coleridge's quicker sense that he took up readily the tone and accents as well as the substance of another's thoughts, whereas in Wordsworth's case, everything that entered his mind from without underwent a slow process of assimilation, and when it reappeared, substance and expression were equally his own".[1.]

Professor William Harper in his book, William Wordsworth, speaks of Coleridge's share in shaping Wordsworth's theories: -- "It must be admitted that as a moderator in criticism Coleridge made some practical amendments to Wordsworth's theory. What he wrote for the world in Biographia Literaria can be only a hundredth part of the wise counsel he gave Wordsworth in private".[2.]

Wordsworth's influence on Coleridge is more generally noted and stressed, however. Hall Caine in his Life of Coleridge

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1. p. 76
2. Vol. II, p. 47.

maintains that "it is certain Coleridge's poetic genius was much stimulated by Wordsworth's conversation. Besides writing The Ancient Mariner, The Dark Ladie, and the first part of Christabel -- poems which were intended to realize the preconceived ideal -- Coleridge finished his tragedy Osorio and wrote The Three Graves, Fears in Solitude, France and Kubla Khan during the period in which he and Wordsworth were near neighbors".[1.]

Professor Knight in his book Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country gives his judgment as follows: --

"I am of opinion that during these prolific years Wordsworth's influence over Coleridge was stronger and in its results more enduring than was Coleridge's over his great poetic brother. It was not so alert and nimble-witted as Coleridge's was over all with whom he came in contact; but it was deeper and more permanent. The rapid assimilative (as well as creative) genius of Coleridge seized and took in with avidity the earliest touches of Wordsworth's imaginative insight; but the latter received and brooded over what he received before he fully assimilated it or even took it in".[2.]

H. D. Traill in his work on Coleridge in the English Men of Letters series gives the following estimate: --

"The most fruitful and important of these (sources) was

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1. p. 65
2. p. 195

unquestionably his intercourse with Wordsworth from whom, although there was doubtless a reciprocation of influence between them, his much more receptive nature received a far deeper impression than it made.

Perhaps the deepest impress of the Wordsworthian influence is to be found in the little poem, Frost at Midnight. Its closing lines might have flowed straight from the pen of Wordsworth himself".[1]

Legouis in Early Life of Wordsworth refers to this influence by pointing out Coleridge's direct imitation: --

"But from the very first Coleridge gave him a surer and more flattering proof of his admiration than any praise; he imitated him forthwith. A passage in Wordsworth's Guilt and Sorrow describes a cart standing in the keen air of morning near a stream which crosses a pebbly road. Within the cart lay

'A pale-faced woman in disease far gone......
Bed under her lean body there was none,
Though even to die near one she most had loved
She could not of herself those wasted limbs have moved'.

She is carried to an inn near at hand,

'From her bare straw the woman half upraised
Her bony visage -- gaunt and deadly wan;
No pity asking, on the group she gazed
With a dim eye, distracted and amazed;
Then sank upon her straw with feeble moan'.[2]

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[1] Vol. VI, p. 42
[2] XL, XLIII

Now Coleridge who had contributed about 100 philosophical lines -- mystical effusions to Southey's epic, Joan of Arc, concluded them, somewhat oddly, with a distressing scene from family life inspired by the above passage from Guilt and Sorrow. He intended to publish these lines separately under the title of Visions of the Maid of Orleans, their object being to show how Joan had become conscious of her mission. Coleridge therefore represents her as witnessing another such melancholy scene as that described by Wordsworth. Prompted by her guardian angel, Joan has left her home before daylight on a winter's morning, alone. By the side of the high road she finds a deserted cart. One of the horses is dead, frozen; the other two are stiff with cold. She calls and a feeble voice replies from under the tilt which covers the wagon, the voice of a poor wretch, with frost-bitten limbs, who creeps painfully toward her. Inside the cart are the motionless forms of his wife and children, frozen to death."[1]

And again: --

"In June 1797 Coleridge heard The Borderers read, and became so infatuated with it as to imitate it in the second part of a tragedy entitled Osorio of which he had already written two and a half acts. Impressed by the character of the villain Oswald, he borrowed his pride and cynical philosophy for the traitor of his

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1. p. 342

own work, a flagrant piece of imitation which begins at the very point in his tragedy where Coleridge had stopped before he became acquainted with The Borderers."[1]

In his Survey of English Literature, Oliver Elton voices the general belief perhaps most clearly: --

"The influence of Wordsworth and his writings upon Coleridge alone is matter for a whole chapter. The likenesses between Intimations of Immortality and Dejection and between Lines to a Gentleman and The Prelude are apparent; and it is the manner of Wordsworth that is the starting point. Coleridge's odes and his reflective blank verse would have been different but for Wordsworth while Love and Kubla Khan and Christabel would have been the same without him."[2]

And, again, in speaking of the poem This Lime Tree Bower my Prison, he says: -- "Every line is in the clean pure Wordsworthian diction, warmed and colored by the tremulous happiness of the writer."[3]

Of The Three Graves he writes: -- "The style is there touched, one must say infected, by Wordsworth's balder one, and therefore sinks often below the necessity of metre, to rise now and

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[1] p. 356
[2] Vol. II, p. 98
[3] Vol. II, p. 107

then to a plain formidable directness: --

'Be blithe as lambs in April are,
As flies when fruits are red;
But God forbid that thought of me
Should haunt your marriage bed.'"[1]

When viewed as a whole, all the critical opinions on the relation of the early poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge converge to one general point, i.e. Coleridge furnished Wordsworth with only abstract ideas and a philosophy which the latter assimilated in his mind and gave forth again only after tingeing them with his own thought; while Wordsworth, on the other hand, influenced Coleridge more directly, coloring his style and altering his themes. Even those critics who stress Coleridge's impress on Wordsworth acknowledge these points. Note that Legouis while emphasizing Coleridge's influence, confines its scope to the providing of Wordsworth with a philosophy which he, Wordsworth, modified in his own mind before giving forth again; Campbell echoes the same idea and maintains that "there are more distinct traces of Wordsworth's influence in Coleridge's poetry than of the converse." The majority of critics give Wordsworth precedence in the matter of influence, and take it for granted that all noticeable points of resemblance found their origin in his work. Elton voices the prevailing opinion when he affirms that "Wordsworth's manner is the starting point."

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[1] Vol. II, p. 109

This statement may be regarded as the starting point of this thesis. That there is a striking similarity between the poems cited by Elton and others is undeniable; that this likeness is not accidental but the result of mutual influence is also plain; but that Wordsworth's manner is the starting point is doubtful. In dealing with the matter of influence I shall endeavor to treat it in its deeper rather than more superficial sense. Accordingly, the statements regarding the actual mutual assistance of the two poets in the composition of poems, such as Professor Knight makes concerning _We Are Seven_ and _The Ancient Mariner_, interesting though they are, can carry no real weight. Likewise the borrowing of definite incidents such as Legouis points out that Coleridge was guilty of in his _Osorio_ and _Destiny of Nations_ must be disregarded. These surface similarities were the inevitable result of a daily intercourse and contemporaneous composition, and are irrelevant to a problem of influence in its true sense. I shall concern myself in this discussion with the larger, broader tendencies of thought and style rather than the details of composition. I shall endeavor to discover whether "Wordsworth's manner was the starting point" -- whether he, after finding his own rightful and permanent channel, turned the more impressionable Coleridge into it for a time. Or, on the other hand, whether Coleridge came into the Wordsworthian channel by a natural development, and, perhaps, preceding Wordsworth, aided him in finding his best mode of

expression.

I shall endeavor to ascertain the true facts in the case by studying the chief characteristics of Wordsworth's early poems and carefully tracing them in Coleridge's verse, noting particularly the time and manner of their appearance.

- II -

The Early Life and Poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge

In order to gain a clear conception of the Wordsworthian manner which,it is claimed, infects some of Coleridge's early poetry, it will be necessary to study the early poems of Wordsworth noting their chief characteristics and the steps in his development which they show.

Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, a small town in Cumberland, April 7, 1770, the second of five children. His parents wisely allowed him perfect freedom and he ranged the woods and fields at will; with his brothers and sister he passed a happy, healthy existence, chiefly out-of-doors. This natural life was not interrupted but continued at Hawkshead, the school to which he was sent in 1778. Books, however, began to claim his thoughts and, while still in school, he wrote his first verse. He relates the circumstances of this in his own words: --

"It may be perhaps as well to mention that the first verses which I wrote were a task imposed by my master; the subject The Summer Vacation; and of my own accord I added others upon Return to School. There was nothing remarkable in either poem; but I was called upon, among other scholars, to write verses upon the completion of the second centenary from the foundation of the school in 1585 by Archbishop Sandys. These verses were much admired, far more than they deserved, for they were but a tame imitation of Pope's versification and a little in his style.

This exercise put it into my head to compose verses from the impulse of my own mind, and I wrote, while yet a school boy, a long poem running upon my own adventures and the scenery of the country in which I was brought up. The only part of the poem which has been preserved is the conclusion of it which stands at the beginning of my collected poems (Dear native regions, etc.)."[1]

About 1786 he wrote another short poem which is preserved under the title Written in Very Early Youth.[2] This and the preceding fragment are pictures of rural scenes described minutely and by the use of simple details.

The early death of his father and mother broke up the little family, but two uncles cared for the children, and the boys remained at Hawkshead. In October, 1787, Wordsworth entered St. John's College, Cambridge, and between 1787 and 1789, he wrote his first long poem An Evening Walk.[3] This work is a series of pictures from Nature with a myth or legend occasionally woven in. The use of simple details indicates a close observation of natural scenes. It is written in the rhyming couplet and the tone is quiet and reflective. The following passage is typical of the whole: --

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[1] Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. I, p. 10
[2] Works, Vol. I, p. 2
[3] Works, Vol. I, p. 3

"Save where with sparkling foam, a small cascade
Illumines from within the leafy shade;
Beyond, along the vista of the brook,
Where antique roots its bustling course o'erlook,
The eye reposes on a secret bridge
Half grey, half shagged with ivy to the ridge;
There, bending o'er the stream, the listless swain
Lingers behind his disappearing wain."[1]

In the summer of 1790, he set off on a walking tour on the continent with a fellow collegian. A letter to his sister Dorothy from Keswill in September 1790, gives a glimpse into the young man's feelings at this time: --

"I am a perfect enthusiast in my admiration of Nature in all her various forms; and I have looked upon, as it were, conversed with, the objects which this country has presented to my view so long and with such increasing pleasure that the idea of parting from them oppresses me with a sadness similar to what I have always felt in quitting a beloved friend!"[2]

And again: --

"At the lake of Como my mind ran through a thousand dreams of happiness which might be enjoyed upon its banks if heightened by conversation and the exercise of the social affections. Among the more awful scenes of the Alps, I had not a thought of man or a single created being; my whole soul was turned to Him who produced the terrible majesty before me."[3]

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[1] Works, Vol. I, p. 9
[2] Letters of the Wordsworth Family, Vol. I, p. 14
[3] Same

He received his degree in January 1791, and after spending a short time in London, made a pedestrian tour through North Wales. In the autumn he went to Paris, Orleans, and Blois, remaining abroad for about thirteen months. It was during a pedestrian tour among the Alps in 1791 - 2 that he wrote his next long poem, Descriptive Sketches.[1] It resembles An Evening Walk closely, differing only in the digression in the latter part into a strain of sentimental philosophy.

In a fit of youthful enthusiasm Wordsworth centered all his hopes on the successful outcome of the French Revolution. Bitterly disappointed and disillusioned over the shattering of his ideals, he returned to England and strove to adjust himself to his surroundings; but it was a hard struggle. His uncle expected him to become a clergyman while his natural tastes inclined toward literary pursuits. In discussing a proposed literary project with William Matthews, he writes to him in May, 1792, as follows: --

"It is at present my intention to take orders in the approaching winter or spring. My uncle the clergyman will furnish me with a title. Had it been in my power I certainly should have wished to defer the moment. But though I may not be resident in London I need not therefore be prevented from engaging in any literary plan which may have the appearance of producing a decent

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[1] Works, Vol. I, p. 30

harvest."[1]

In 1793 he published Descriptive Sketches and An Evening Walk, chiefly because of the reason he gave his friend Matthews: --

"It was with great reluctance that I huddled up those two little works and sent them into the world in so imperfect a state. But as I had done nothing by which to distinguish myself at the University, I thought these little things might show that I could do something."[2]

In 1793 - 4 he wrote Guilt and Sorrow[3] in which he departs somewhat from his former style. He adopts the Spenserian stanza and, leaving the realm of pure description, concerns himself chiefly in telling a story. A greater simplicity of expression is apparent in the word order and in the choice of common unpoetic words. Simple details also are still employed. Note, for example, the opening lines: --

"A traveler on the skirt of Sarum's Plain
Pursued his vagrant way, with feet half bare: -

. . . .

Down fell in straggling locks his thin grey hair;
A coat he wore of military red,
But faded and stuck o'er with many a patch and shred."[4]

And again: --

"Thus warned, he sought some shepherd's spreading thorn,
Or hovel from the storm to shield his head,
But sought in vain; for now all wild, forlorn,
And vacant, a huge waste around him spread;
The cold wet ground, he feared must be his only bed."[5]

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1. Letters of the Wordsworth Family, Vol. I, p. 43
2. Same, p. 67
3. Works, Vol. I, p. 71
4. Works, Vol. I, p. 73
5. Works, Vol. I, p. 75

These years mark a period of extreme despondence and lassitude in Wordsworth. We may glimpse his state of mind in a letter to Matthews dated February 17, 1794: --

"You have learned from Myers that since I had the pleasure of seeing you I have done nothing and still continue to do nothing. What is to become of me I know not. I cannot bow down my mind to take orders and as for the law I have neither strength of mind, purse or constitution to engage in that pursuit. Of Spanish I have read none these three years and little Italian, but of French I esteem myself a tolerable master. My Italian studies I am going to resume immediately, as it is my intention to instruct my sister in that language."[1]

He followed several will o' the wisp projects but could settle down to nothing. He spent several months in Keswick caring for a sick friend, Raisley Calvert; his restlessness is apparent in a letter written in 1794: --

"I begin to wish much to be in town. Cataracts and mountains are good occasional society, but they will not do for constant companions; besides, I have not even much of their conversation, and still less of that of my books as I am so much with my sick friend.... Nothing, indeed, but a sense of duty could detain me here under the present circumstances. This is a country for poetry, it is true;

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[1] Letters of the Wordsworth Family, Vol. I, p. 57

but the Muse is not to be won but by the sacrifice of time, and time I have not to spare."[1]

Upon the death of this friend Raisley Calvert early in 1795 and the discovery of a 900 pound bequest left by him to Wordsworth, the latter was freed from the restraints of poverty and allowed to follow a more congenial life. In the autumn of that year, 1795, he brought to pass an old beautiful dream when he made a home for himself and his beloved sister Dorothy at Racedown Lodge near Crewkerne in Dorsetshire. During this same year he wrote his tragedy _The Borderers_[2]. He had just finished this drama when he came into intimate contact with Coleridge; before speaking of that time, however, it will be necessary to comment briefly on Coleridge's early life and poems.

Coleridge, the last of thirteen children, was born in the Vicarage of Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire, October 21, 1772. His childhood was not as happy as Wordsworth's, owing to an extremely sensitive nature which those about him could not understand. He did not mingle with the boys of his own age but withdrew into a world of books and fancy and dreams. He overcame this morbidity later, and while at Christ's Hospital and later at Cambridge he was a youth among youths. His early poetry reflects the dreamy,

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[1] _Letters of the Wordsworth Family_, Vol. I, p. 79
[2] Works, Vol. I, p. 108. A piece of work irrelevant to this discussion.

melancholy, and gayer sides of his nature. He delights in abstractions and the personification of Hope, Love, Joy, etc. as in Monody on the Death of Chatterton,[1] Destruction of the Bastille,[2] Music,[3] Progress of Vice,[4] etc. Or he chose to write in a light humorous vein on subjects like The Nose,[5] Julia,[6] Monody on a Tea Kettle,[7] Devonshire Roads,[8] etc. His themes are as various as the experiences through which the impetuous young man passed; they range through all emotions and feelings -- love, patriotism, rebellion, melancholy, despair, joy, sympathy, etc. This variety of theme is equaled in the variety of verse forms which he employs. Few metres and rhyme schemes are left untried by the young writer.

In comparing the work of the two poets written before their intimacy, the most outstanding difference is that of quantity. Coleridge, though two years younger, had written far more than Wordsworth. Many of his poems are inconsequential, it is true, but the fact remains that in sheer bulk he far exceeds his elder poetic brother. Both poets were young and experimenting in an effort to find that mode of expression which best suited their own thoughts and feelings. Wordsworth had written only two long poems and five short ones and, in these, he shows no large range of style or theme.

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[1] Works, p. 16
[2] Works, p. 7
[3] Works, p. 11
[4] Works, p. 10
[5] Works, p. 5
[6] Works, p. 4
[7] Works, p. 8
[8] Works, p. 14

His indecision and restlessness are apparent in a silence rather than an abundance of startling contrasts. He had approached what was to be his characteristic manner in The Yew Tree Seat[1] of 1795. Coleridge, on the other hand, quicker and more impetuous, had voiced his various feelings in verses of all styles and themes. His early poetry is little more than a succession of changes.

Coleridge and Wordsworth first came into indirect contact in 1794, according to the former's own statement: --

"During the last year of my residence at Cambridge I became acquainted with Mr. Wordsworth's Descriptive Sketches, and seldom if ever was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced."[2]

The next reference to him appears in a note to his poem, Lines Written at Shurton Bars near Bridgewater, September 1795: --

"The expression 'green radiance' is borrowed from Mr. Wordsworth, a poet whose versification is occasionally harsh and his diction too frequently obscure; but whom I deem unrivalled among the writers of the present day in manly sentiment, novel imagery, and vivid coloring."[3]

Just when and where the two poets first actually met is

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[1] Works, Vol. I, p. 104
[2] Biographia Literaria, Vol. I , p. 74
[3] Works, p. 99

not certain, but Professor Knight, after a careful examination of all obtainable data on the subject, concludes that the introduction took place in Mr. Pinney's house in Great George street in Bristol, "in the early autumn, viz. August or September of the year 1795".[1] Wordsworth and his sister settled at Racedown in October, 1795; Coleridge went to reside at Nether Stowey on December 31, 1796. As early as May 1796, we find Coleridge, in a letter to John Thelwall, referring to Wordsworth as "a very dear friend of mine who is, in my opinion, the best poet of the age";[2] but it is certain that no real intimacy was established between the two poets until Coleridge's visit to Racedown June 16, 1796. He went again on June 28, and on July 2 he took the two Wordsworths back with him to Nether Stowey for a week. That an instantaneous regard and admiration for each other was excited among Coleridge, Wordsworth, and his sister Dorothy, is apparent.

Writing to Joseph Cottle in June, 1797, Coleridge speaks thus of Wordsworth: --

"I speak with heartfelt sincerity and (I think) unblinded judgment, when I tell you that I feel myself _a little man by his side_, and yet do not think myself the less man than I formerly thought myself."[3]

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[1] _Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country_, p. 8
[2] _Letters of S. T. Coleridge_, Vol. I, p. 163
[3] Same, p. 221

And again in the next month to Southey: --

"Wordsworth is a very great man, the only man to whom at all times and in all modes of excellence I feel myself inferior, the only one, I mean, whom I have yet met with, for the London literati appear to me to be very much like little potatoes, that is, no great things, a compost of nullity and dullity."[1.]

In March of the following year he voices the same refrain:--

"The giant Wordsworth -- God love him! Even when I speak in the terms of admiration due to his intellect, I fear lest these terms should keep out of sight the amiableness of his manners."[2.]

Wordsworth in his turn was as enthusiastic over Coleridge; he writes: --

"He is the most wonderful man I have ever known --wonderful for the originality of his mind and the power he possesses of throwing out in profusion grand central truths from which might be evolved the most comprehensive systems.... He and my sister are the two beings to whom my intellect is most indebted."[3.]

It was only natural that these two young writers should turn at once to the discussion of things literary in their talks together. Coleridge had published an edition of poems in the

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1. Letters of S. T. Coleridge, Vol. I, p. 224
2. Same, p. 239
3. Wordsworth: Symington, Vol. I, p. 99

earlier part of the year, but at the time of Wordsworth's arrival, he was leading an unsettled and distracted life, trying to write a tragedy Osorio, for the Drury Lane Theater and "carrying on much untoward, unremunerative and resultless work by preaching in Unitarian chapels near at hand -- at Bridgwater and Taunton -- without any arrangement or offer of reward."[1] Wordsworth, during the autumn of 1795, the winter of 1795 - 6 and the summer of 1797 had written his tragedy, The Borderers. Their latest pieces of work claimed the attention of the two almost immediately after meeting; Dorothy writes thus, in speaking of Coleridge's first visit to Racedown: --

"After tea he (Coleridge) repeated two and a half acts of his tragedy Osorio. The next morning William read his tragedy The Borderers."[2]

On July 31, 1797 Wordsworth and his sister moved from Racedown to Alfoxden, a beautiful place within three miles of Nether Stowey, in order to be near Coleridge. This date marks the beginning of eleven months of constant daily intercourse of mind with mind and soul with soul. Dorothy's Journal affords the best record of this close association. In the account of almost every

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[1] Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country, p. 50
[2] Letters of the Wordsworth Family, Vol. I, p. 109

day such an entry appears: --

"Coleridge, William and I walked in the evening."[1]

"William, Coleridge and I walked in the park a short time."[2]

"Coleridge, William and myself set forward to the chedder rocks."[3]

Coleridge has called them "three people with one soul". This intercourse could not fail to act as a powerful stimulant on the minds of the two men. By a curious coincidence, both their tragedies, written at approximately the same time, were rejected in London at the same time -- December, 1797. Before this, however, a new plan had been evolved between them. In November Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy, wishing to go on a walking tour, decided that the two men should compose a poem jointly which should defray the expense of the little trip. They characteristically set out on the journey before writing the poem, and discussed it during the walk. This was the beginning of The Ancient Mariner.[4] Wordsworth, in relating the incident, acknowledges that he furnished several incidents and a few lines, but ended -- "as we endeavoured to proceed conjointly, **our** respective manners proved so widely different

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[1] Journal, Vol. I, p. 13
[2] Same
[3] Same, p. 18
[4] Works, p. 169

that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog...... The Ancient Mariner grew and grew till it became too important for our first object which was limited to our expectation of five pounds: and we began to talk of a volume which was to consist, as Mr. Coleridge has told the world, of poems chiefly on natural subjects taken from common life, but looked at, as much as might be, through an imaginative medium. Accordingly, I wrote We Are Seven[1]; The Idiot Boy,[2] Her Eyes are Wild,[3] The Thorn,[4] and some others."[5]

This incident furnished the starting point for a great increased literary activity on the part of both poets. The spring of 1798 was a fruitful time for Wordsworth especially. He worked for a time on The Recluse[6] and in March began writing ballads. These are best studied in the light of the theory which he fully formulated and later set forth in the preface to Lyrical Ballads, as follows: --

"The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the

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[1] Works, Vol. I, p. 198
[2] Works, p. 248
[3] Works, p. 222
[4] Works, p. 207
[5] Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country, p. 163
[6] The Excursion and The Prelude are part of the originally projected poem.

same time, to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and further and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen........"[1]

It is interesting to note how well Wordsworth followed his theory. The group of ballads written in this spring, We Are Seven, The Thorn, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, The Idiot Boy, etc. are, following the definition of a ballad, simple stories told in a simple style. Each one relates an incident simple in itself but indicating an underlying theme which is fundamental in human nature. The people, also, are of the lower or middle classes. But Wordsworth does not confine himself entirely to ballads during this period. In Lines Written in Early Spring,[2] To My Sister,[3] Expostulation and Reply,[4] and The Tables Turned,[5] he goes back to his old meditative manner, retaining, however, the simplicity of the ballad form. His theme again is Nature but he deals more with the inter-

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[1] Wordsworth's Poems, (ed. 1815) p. 365
[2] Works, Vol. I, p. 232
[3] Works, Vol. I, p. 234
[4] Works, Vol. I, p. 237
[5] Works, Vol. I, p. 238

pretation than the observation of it. His philosophy shows a trace of pantheism: --

> "To her fair works did Nature link
> The human soul that through me ran;"[1]

Here, first, also he comments on the moral influence which Nature exerts on man: --

> "And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
> He, too, is no mean preacher:
> Come forth into the light of things,
> Let Nature be your teacher.
> . . . .
> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can."[2]

These are but traces of an interpretation of Nature which finds its summary and final consummation in Tintern Abbey,[3] written July 13, 1798. He leaves the extreme simplicity of the ballad form and in meditative blank verse sets forth his philosophy of Nature. The entire poem is permeated with pantheism, as for example: --

> "And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

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1. Lines Written in Early Spring
2. The Tables Turned
3. Works, Vol. I, p. 265

He traces the successive stages through which he has passed in his reaction to Nature's influences. At first it filled him with only "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" --

"The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colors and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye."

Later, however, he is

"Well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

. . . .

Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy; for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thots that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings."

Coleridge also carried out his part of the joint plan elaborated by himself and Wordsworth. In his Biographia Literaria

he explains what his part of the theory was: --

"It was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith."[1]

Following this, he wrote The Ancient Mariner, his masterpiece, but he pursued it no further at once. He persisted in his habit of using a variety of forms and themes, political and philosophical, impassioned and meditative. He reaches his greatest heights in his strange dream masterpieces, Christabel,[2] and Kubla Khan,[3] which are significant in his development but are too peculiarly his own to occupy a place in a discussion of influence.

This summary of Wordsworth's development and the noteworthy characteristics of his style and theme afford us the light in which we are to examine Coleridge's poems. This survey of the intimacy of the two poets furnishes a background for the poetry written during this period and is the external evidence on which critics have based their conclusions. It now remains to trace the Wordsworthian elements in Coleridge's poetry and to endeavor to prove whether or not "Wordsworth's manner was the starting point".

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[1] Vol. II, p. 6
[2] Works, p. 233
[3] Works, p. 265

- III -

Wordsworthian Elements in Coleridge's Verse

Any decision as to whether or not Wordsworth's manner was "the starting point" must be based upon an investigation of the Wordsworthian elements in Coleridge's poetry - especially upon the time of their appearance and the manner of their entrance. A comparison of the dates of composition of those poems which show similar elements will aid in answering this question of influence; and a study of the way in which these elements first appear in Coleridge's verse will show whether they came there as the result of contact with the thoughts of another or of a natural gradual development.

These Wordsworthian elements which appear in Coleridge's early poetry are of theme and style. Wordsworth treats his chief theme, Nature, in two ways: - first, he gives evidence of close observation by using minute details in his descriptions of natural scenes; secondly, he shows the influence of nature on man's feelings, mind, and moral being. His close observation is apparent in his earliest poems and is best exemplified in his first two long ones - An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches.[1] This element, though not observable in Coleridge's first poems, soon crept into his verse. In 1788 he

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[1] ibid, p. 14

he wrote To the Autumnal Moon[1] and in 1790, To the Evening Star[2] though in his treatment of both themes he uses no significant details. In Happiness[3] of the next year, he shows a deeper intimacy with the beauties of nature, and in Sonnet to the River Otter[4] and Lines to a Beautiful Spring in a Village[5] of 1793, he notes a few simple details sympathetically and somewhat minutely: -

> "Mine eye
> I never shut amid the sunny ray,
> But, straight with all their tints thy waters rise,
> Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows grey,
> And bedd'd sand that, vein'd with various dyes,
> Gleam'd through thy bright transparence."

Evidence of a closer observation appears in Lines Composed While Climbing the Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb, Somersetshire, May, 1795[6] -

> "Far off the unvarying cuckoo soothes my ear.
> Up scour the startling stragglers of the flock
> That on green plots o'er precipices browse:
> From the forced fissures of the naked rock
> The Yew tree bursts! Beneath its dark green boughs
> (Mid which the May-thorn blends its blossoms white)
> Where broad smooth stones jut out in mossy seats,
> I rest;"

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[1] Works, p. 2
[2] Works, p. 12
[3] Works, p. 25
[4] Works, p. 39
[5] Works, p. 40
[6] Works, p. 90

And again in The Eolian Harp[1]: -

"most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown
With white-flower'd Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)
And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,
Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve
Serenely brilliant (such should wisdom be)
Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents
Snatch'd from yon bean-field! and the world so hush'd!
The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of Silence."

This is apparent in a more marked degree in Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement[2]: -

"Oh! what a goodly scene! Here the Bleak Mount,
The bare bleak mountain speckled thin with sheep;
Grey Clouds, that shadowing spot the sunny fields;
And River, now with bushy rocks o'erbrowed,
Now winding bright and full, with naked banks;
And seats, and lawns, the abbey and the wood,
And cots, and Hamlets, and faint City-spire:
The Channel there, the Islands and White Sails,
Dim coasts, and cloud-like Hills, and shoreless Ocean -"

And in To a Young Friend[3]: -

"A mount, not wearisome and bare and steep,
But a green mountain variously up-piled,
Where o'er the jutting rocks soft mosses creep,
Or color'd lichens with slow oozing weep;
Where cypress and the darker yew start wild,
And 'mid the summer torrent's gentle dash
Dance brighten'd the red clusters of the ash;"

It is significant that Coleridge first used detailed description

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1. Works, p. 92
2. Works, p. 102
3. Works, p. 111

in 1793 [1] before he had read Wordsworth's two poems [2] and he had used it thus freely in succeeding passages before he came into direct contact with Wordsworth. Moreover, his detailed descriptions written after the summer of 1797 show no changes but only follow the bent which they had previously taken. Note, for example, this characteristic one in <u>This Lime Tree Bower my Prison</u> [3] composed in June 1797: --

> "that branchless ash,
> Unsunned and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
> Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still
> Fanned by the water-fall! and there my friends
> Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds,
> That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)
> Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
> Of the blue clay-stone."

And in <u>Frost at Midnight</u>: -- [4]

> "Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
> Whether the Summer clothe the general earth
> With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
> Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
> Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
> Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
> Heard only in the trances of the blast,
> Or if the secret ministry of Frost
> Shall hang them up in silent icicles
> Quietly shining to the quiet moon."

And again in <u>Fears in Solitude</u>: -- [5]

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1. In <u>Sonnet to the River Otter</u> and <u>Lines to a Beautiful Spring in a Village</u>.
2. ibid, p. 21
3. Works, p. 145
4. Works, p. 206
5. Works, p. 219

"A green and silent spot, amid the hills,
A small and silent dell! O'er stiller place
No singing sky-lark ever poised himself.
The hills are heathy, save that swelling slope,
Which hath a gay and gorgeous coloring on,
All golden with the never-bloomless furze,
Which now blooms most profusely: but the dell,
Bathed by the mist, is fresh and delicate
As vernal corn-field or the unripe flax,
When, through its half-transparent stalks, at eve,
The level Sunshine glimmers with green light."

This close observation is most strongly emphasized in The Nightingale[1]; that the entire poem is permeated with a close sympathy with Nature is evidenced by passages like the following: --

"No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues.
Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge!

. . . .

On moon-lit bushes,
Whose dewy leaflets are but half disclosed,
You may perchance behold them (nightingales) on the twigs,
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade
Lights up her love-torch."

From this investigation it is evident that Coleridge did use this distinctly Wordsworthian element; but it is also evident that he used it before he had ever read any poem of Wordsworth's, and he used in freely before he became acquainted with him. Moreover it does not spring, full-fledged, into his verse, but creeps

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1. Works, p. 225

in slowly and with increasing excellence, and shows no decided changes parallel with the poet's intimacy with Wordsworth.

Wordsworth registers three distinct effects of Nature upon man -- the appeal to the feelings, the mind, and the moral being. The first he describes in 1791 - 2 in Descriptive Sketches:--

"Think not the peasant from aloft has gazed
And heard with heart unmoved, with soul unraised:
Nor is his spirit less enrapt, nor less
Alive to independent happiness,
Then, when he lies, out-stretched, at even-tide
Upon the fragrant mountain's purple side:" [1]

But his best expression comes later. A hint of these effects of Nature on the feelings is found in Coleridge's Happiness written in 1791, before he had seen Wordsworth's poem: --

"'Tis thine with Fancy oft to talk
And thine the peaceful evening walk;
And what to thee the sweetest are --
The setting sun, the evening star --
The tints that live along the sky,
And moon that meets thy raptur'd eye." [2]

A clearer expression of it comes in To The Nightingale of 1795: --

"O! I have listened, till my working soul
Wak'd by those strains to thousand phantasies,
Absorb'd, hath ceas'd to listen!" [3]

Still more plainly is it evident in Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement: --

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1. Works, Vol. I, p. 56
2. Works, Vol. I, p. 27
3. Works, Vol. I, p. 89

"God, methought,
Had built him there a Temple: the whole World
Seem'd imaged in its vast circumference:
No *wish* profaned my overwhelméd heart.
Blest hour! It was a Luxury, -- to be!"[1]

And again in *On Observing a Blossom on the First of February, 1796*:--

"And the warm wooings of this sunny day
Tremble along my frame, and harmonize
The attemper'd organ, that even saddest thoughts
Mix with some sweet sensations, like harsh tunes
Played deftly on a soft-toned instrument."[2]

Perhaps the best expression appears in *This Lime Tree Bower my Prison*: --

"So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent, with swimming sense."[3]

Yet this was written in June, 1797, nearly a year before Wordsworth's similar best expression of the thought, in *Tintern Abbey* of July, 1798: --

"The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colors and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye."[4]

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1. Works, p. 103
2. Works, p. 106
3. Works, p. 146
4. Works, Vol. I, p. 268

Here, again, then, it is evident that Coleridge expressed the Wordsworthian feeling before he had read Wordsworth's work, and he expressed it best and most clearly before Wordsworth formulated his clearest statement of the thought. Here again, also, the development of the idea is apparent in the increasing clearness of the expression of it.

The second appeal of Nature to man -- the appeal to his intellect resulting in his interpretation or philosophy of Nature -- may also be traced throughout Colerdige's work, though it does not appear so frequently. Wordsworth's first tendency toward pantheism is not visible until 1798 in Lines Written in Early Spring;[1] Coleridge in his Religious Musings of 1794 first voices such a philosophy: --

"Adore with steadfast unpresuming gaze
Him, Nature's Essence, Mind, and Energy!"[2]

It comes again in The Eolian Harp of 1795: --

"O! the One Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its Soul
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,[3]
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere --"

Another expression is found in Frost at Midnight: --

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[1] ibid, p. 27
[2] Works, p. 76
[3] Works, p. 93

"So shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself."[1]

It is significant that Coleridge had voiced this pantheistic creed with increasing certainty and clearness and had doubtless discussed it with Wordsworth before it first appeared in the latter's poetry -- the spring of 1798.

The last aspect of Nature -- its moral effect on man -- is, perhaps, the most distinctly Wordsworthian. It first appears in The Tables Turned, written in the spring of 1798,[2] and finds its best expression in Tintern Abbey of July of the same year: --

"Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings."[3]

Coleridge, eleven months before, had voiced the same idea in similar fashion in This Lime Tree Bower my Prison: --

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[1] Works, p. 207
[2] ibid, p. 28
[3] Works, Vol. I, p. 270

"Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure --
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to Love and Beauty!"[1]

A little later, in The Dungeon he writes thus of the effects of Nature on a sinful man: --

"With other ministrations thou, O Nature!
Healest thy wandering and distempered child:
Thou pourest on him thy sweet influences
Thy sunny hues, fair forms and breathing sweets,
Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,
Till he relent and can no more endure
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
His angry spirit healed and harmonized
By he benignant touch of Love and Beauty."[2]

Coleridge gives perhaps his best expression of the idea in Fears in Solitude written in April, 1798, still before the composition of Tintern Abbey: --

"And he, with many feelings, many thoughts,
Made up a meditative joy, and found
Religious meanings in the forms of nature![3]

. . . .

To me, who from thy lakes and mountain-hills,
Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,
Have drunk in all my intellectual life,
All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,
All adoration of the God in Nature,
All lovely and all honorable things,
Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel
The joy and greatness of its future being."[4]

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1. Works, p. 146
2. Works, p. 150
3. Works, p. 220
4. Works, p. 224

It is significant that Coleridge expresses this influence of Nature on man before Wordsworth does; and that he gives to it an increasing emphasis in successive poems, showing, thereby a deepening seriousness and maturity of thought. A summary of all the traces of Wordsworthian theme in Coleridge's poetry shows that this theme in its various phases and aspects appears in Coleridge's verse either before it does in Wordsworth's, or before he had seen Wordsworth's similar work. Moreover, it appears so gradually in every case that only one conclusion remains, i.e. that it is the result of a natural development in Coleridge rather than any external influence.

In considering the similar stylistic elements of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poems, it is noteworthy that Coleridge, when treating Wordsworthian themes uses also the Wordsworthian form and tone. When he voices the so-called Wordsworthian philosophy of Nature, he employs blank verse in the elevated and reflective tone which characterizes Tintern Abbey.[1] Yet, as it has been pointed out, in a comparison of the dates of these similar poems, Coleridge's verse antedates either Wordsworth's work or his influence upon Coleridge.[2]

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[1] ibid, p. 39
[2] ibid, p. 39

The most important element of Wordsworth's style, however, is his use of simple diction. His theory that the language of poetry should be the natural language of real men in every day life has aided most in making his verse distinctive. He first approaches this use of simple words and word order in Guilt and Sorrow of 1793 - 4. This is only an approach, however, because the Spenserian stanza which he employs, necessarily forces an artificial arrangement of words. He does not reach the real culmination of this simplicity of style until his first ballads, We Are Seven, etc. written in the spring of 1798.

Coleridge's manner, at first, is far more fanciful than Wordsworth's ever is. Following the general nature of the poetry of that period, he delights in much personification; these lines may be considered typical of his earliest poems: --

> "Away, grim Phantom! Scorpion King -- away!
> Reserve thy terrors and thy stings display
> For coward Wealth and Guilt in robes of state!"[1]

Or these: --

> "May this (I cried) my course through Life portray!
> New scenes of wisdom may each step display,
> And Knowledge open as my days advance!
> Till what time Death shall pour the undarken'd ray,
> My eye shall dart thro' infinite expanse,
> And Thought suspended lie in Rapture's blissful trance!"[2]

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[1] Monody on the Death of Chatterton, Works, p. 16
[2] Life, Works, p. 15

His diction is extremely poetical and his word order far from natural. But a gradual change takes place in his verse. A deepening seriousness and maturity of thought are apparent in Moriens Superstiti and Morienti Superstes, and this deeper feeling follows a natural law of literature when it expresses itself in simpler language. When Coleridge faces death seriously, he leaves the realm of the abstract and speaks directly and plainly. Note the opening lines of Moriens Superstiti: --

"The Hour-bell sounds and I must go:
Death waits -- again I hear him calling."[1]

And the closing lines of Morienti Superstes: --

"Thou, in peace, in silence sleeping,
In some still world, unknown, remote,
The Mighty Parent's care hast found,
Without whose tender guardian thought
No sparrow falleth to the ground."[2]

This is still more noteworthy in Lines to a Friend together with an Unfinished Poem. When Coleridge's heart is stirred by a genuine deep human sympathy for Charles Lamb in his troubles, he throws off the restraint of rhyme and speaks to his friend as directly and simply as blank verse will allow. He thus voices his grief for his own sister: --

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1. Works, p. 54
2. Works, p. 54

"I too a sister had -- an only sister;
She loved me dearly and I doted on her.

. . . .

O! I have woke at midnight and have wept
Because she was not!"[1]

This tendency toward simplicity is more plainly evident, however, in those poems which have already been noted for their Wordsworthian theme. Lines Composed While Climbing the Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb furnishes an example: --

"Beneath its dark green boughs
(Mid which the May-thorn blends its blossoms white)
Where broad smooth stones jut out in mossy seats,
I rest: -"[2]

The same tendency is observable in The Eolian Harp: --

"My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o'ergrown
With white-flower'd Jasmin and the broad-leav'd Myrtle,"[3]

It is more marked in the opening lines of Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement: --

"Low was our pretty cot; our tallest rose
Peep'd at the chamber-window. We could hear
At silent noon, and eve, and early morn
The sea's faint murmur. In the open air
Our myrtles blossom'd; and across the porch
Thick jasmins twin'd;"[4]

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1. Works, p. 67
2. Works, p. 90
3. Works, p. 92
4. Works, p. 102

The Dungeon furnishes another example of simple expression--

"And this place our forefathers made for men!
This is the process of our love and wisdom,
To each poor brother who offends against us --
Most innocent perhaps -- and what if guilty?
Is this the only cure?"[1].

This Lime Tree Bower my Prison perhaps most closely approaches the characteristic Wordsworthian simplicity of expression: --

"Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watched
Some broad and sunny leaf, and loved to see
The shadow of the leaf and stem above
Dappling in sunshine! And that walnut-tree
Was deeply tinged, and a deep radiance lay
Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
Those fronting elms, and now with blackest mass
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
Through the late twilight."[2].

It is significant that Coleridge's poetry had undergone this simplifying process and reached the point noted in this last poem, before he had read any similar verse of Wordsworth's. He gains the highest point in this development toward simplicity in his first ballad The Three Graves[3]; here for the first time, he really follows Wordsworth's theory. It is interesting to compare the dates of the actual composition of the first real ballad of each.

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1. Works, p. 150
2. Works, p. 146
3. Works, p. 153

Coleridge, writing to Joseph Cottle on February 18, 1798 states that his ballad is finished.[1.] We know that Wordsworth had written no ballad before 1798; until the last of December he was busy with his tragedy. The Recluse, moreover, occupied his thoughts during the first months of 1798, according to his own words to James Tobin on March 6: --

"I have written 1300 lines of a poem[2.] in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed."[3.]

No definite mention of a ballad appears until the entry for March 19 in Dorothy's Journal: --

"William wrote some lines describing a stunted thorn."[4.]

Subsequently, however, she refers to the composition of various ballads rather frequently. Wordsworth himself writes: --

"We are Seven was composed in the spring of 1798, and a group of similar poems followed."[5.]

Since Coleridge had finished his ballad by the middle of February and Wordsworth wrote his "in the spring", it is practically certain that Coleridge's work antedated Wordsworth's by a month or more.

It is plain that before Coleridge came in contact with

[1.] Recollections of Coleridge: Cottle, p. 307

[2.] The projected Recluse of which The Excursion and The Prelude are parts.

[3.] Letters of the Wordsworth Family, Vol. I, p. 115

[4.] Vol. I, p. 14

[5.] Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. I, p. 106

Wordsworth himself or with his work, he was tending toward that simplicity of diction and word order which is called Wordsworthian; and he reached the culmination of this tendency before his friend did. Moreover, the manner of entrance of this element is more significant than that of any of the preceding ones which have been noted. It is very gradual, appearing only at intervals, faint at first and slowly becoming more apparent. It follows consistently, also, the growth of Coleridge's mind and the development of his literary powers. These facts can lead to only one conclusion -- that in style as well as in theme Coleridge was not influenced by Wordsworth but developed naturally and independently.

- IV -

Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion the distinctive Wordsworthian characteristics have been pointed out and classified under two main heads, theme and style; these have been further subdivided as follows:--

I. Theme -- Nature
    1. Evidence of close observation of Nature by the use of minute details,
    2. Appeal of Nature to man's
        a. Feelings
        b. Mind
        c. Spirit or moral being.
II. Style
    1. Use of simple diction and forms

Each of these characteristics has been traced in Coleridge's poetry, and a comparison has been made between the date of composition of those poems of Coleridge's and of Wordsworth's in which it appears. In the case of every one it has been found that the Wordsworthian element enters Coleridge's verse either before Wordsworth had used it or before Coleridge had come under Wordsworth's influence in any way. Moreover, Coleridge finds his fullest and best expression of each Wordsworthian element before Wordsworth best voices it. This result of the comparison of dates of composi-

tion proves that Coleridge did not receive his initial impulse to write in a Wordsworthian fashion from Wordsworth but elsewhere. And a possible explanation of this other source is indicated by the significant discovery resulting from an investigation of the manner of the entrance of these Wordsworthian characteristics: -- each of the elements enters Coleridge's verse, not abruptly but gradually. It is scarcely observable at first but is emphasized more and more in succeeding poems until at last it stands out plainly and distinctively. Moreover, this gradual development of ideas and style coincides so exactly with the mental growth of the young man that it seems superfluous to seek an explanation of it in any external influence. It is evident that the Wordsworthian elements in Coleridge's poems came to be there as the result of the growth of the poet's mind and the development of his literary powers. Intimacy with Wordsworth and a strong admiration for him doubtless aided this development but Wordsworth was not "the starting point".

Whether or not Coleridge's manner served as a starting point for Wordsworth is another question. There is some evidence that it did. Wordsworth did not express his pantheistic philosophy or his theory of the moral influence of Nature on man, and he did not follow his theory of simple diction until after he knew Coleridge and his poems setting forth these theories. Moreover, the decided change that is visible in Wordsworth's verse after the

beginning of his intimacy with Coleridge points to the same conclusion. His letters exhibit his restlessness and discontent in the years preceding 1797.[1] Even after he had begun a serene existence at Racedown with Dorothy, he could not conquer his listlessness and write. Yet at the end of 1797 and the beginning of 1798, a new vigor and grip on life are visible in his writings. There is no doubt that the stimulus of Coleridge's brilliant mind roused him to a new active interest in his surroundings. This interest extended over into his work and in the spring of 1798 he wrote nearly as much verse as in all the years preceding. Moreover, an abrupt change in his poetry is ushered in with We Are Seven -- a change which proves lasting and influential in his later work. The theory formulated with Coleridge bore fresh and permanent fruits.

These facts suggest that Coleridge's manner rather than Wordsworth's was the starting point; but there is not sufficient evidence to establish this suggestion as truth. These particular ideas and manner of expression were so peculiarly well adapted to Wordsworth's mind and temperament that it is only reasonable to suppose that he was slowly developing toward them and would have attained them eventually, independently of any outside influence. The discussion of relationship may be summed up by concluding that there was a reciprocal influence which was inevitable with such intimacy; but, contrary to current literary criticism, Coleridge

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[1] ibid, p. 18

approached the Wordsworthian style by the internal development of his mind and powers and not from any external influence from Wordsworth; on the other hand, there are several indications pointing to the fact that Coleridge's manner was "the starting point" for Wordsworth, although this cannot be stated with certainty.

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